

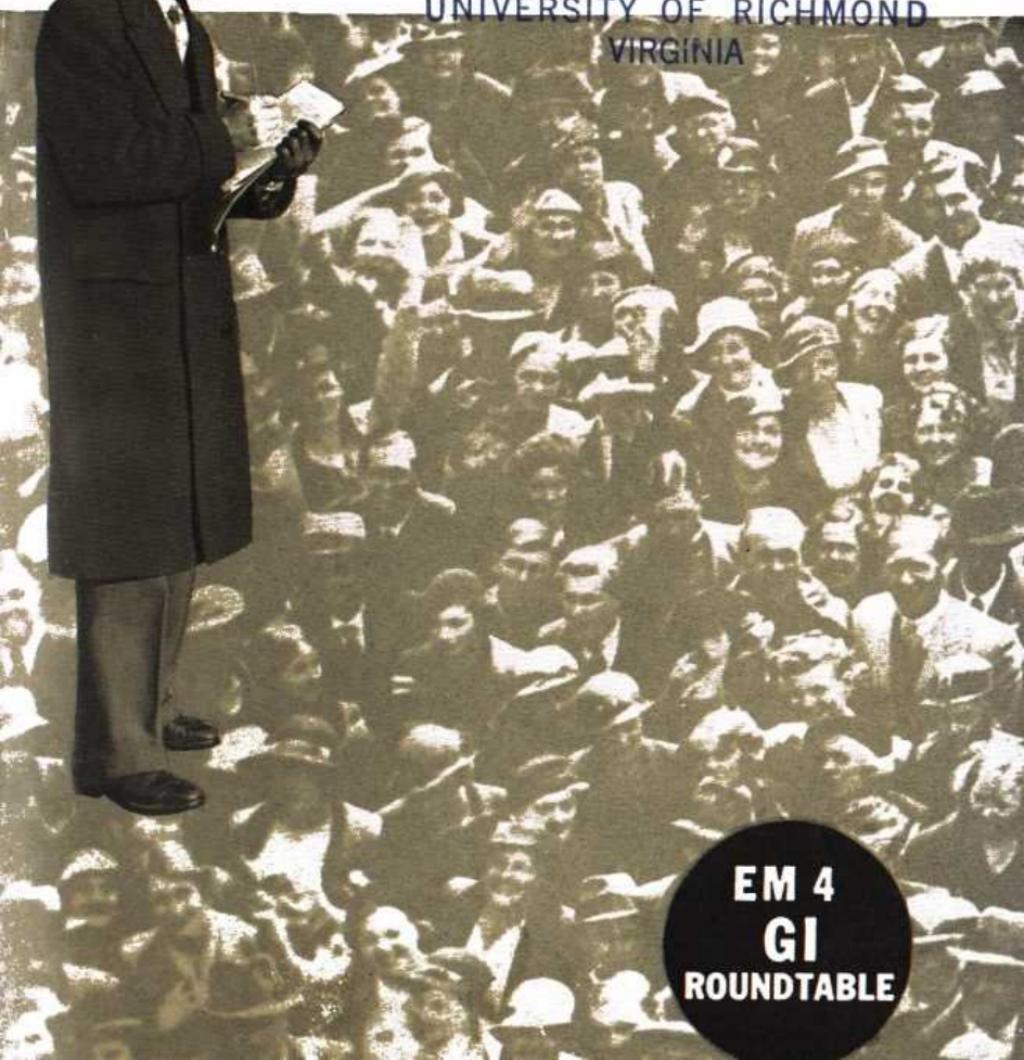
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# ARE OPINION POLLS USEFUL?

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EM 4  
GI  
ROUNDTABLE

Prepared for  
THE UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES  
by  
**THE AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION**

This pamphlet is one of a series made available by the War Department under the series title *GI Roundtable*. As the general title indicates, *GI Roundtable* pamphlets provide material which information-education officers may use in conducting group discussions or forums as part of an off-duty education program, and which operators of Armed Forces Radio Service outlets may use in preparing GI Radio Roundtable discussion broadcasts.

The content of this pamphlet has been prepared by the Historical Service Board of the American Historical Association. Each pamphlet in the series has only one purpose: to provide factual information and balanced arguments as a basis for discussion of all sides of the question. It is not to be inferred that the War Department endorses any one of the particular views presented.

*Specific suggestions for the discussion or forum leader who plans to use this pamphlet will be found on page 40.*

WAR DEPARTMENT  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C., 22 Jan 1946  
[A.G. 300.7 (22 Jan 46).]

**EM 4, GI Roundtable: Are Opinion Polls Useful?**

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# ARE OPINION POLLS USEFUL?

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The people's voice is odd,  
It is, and it is not, the voice of God.

Alexander Pope

## WHAT WAS THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY OF POLLING OPINION?

**I**F YOU have been a soldier for some length of time perhaps you feel confident that you know what "we believe" or what "our regiment believes" on certain subjects. Doubtless you've talked to hundreds of men representing all shades of opinion within your group. That is why you believe you know what "we" think. On a few questions you may even be ready to say what the soldiers in "this man's army" believe. You may not hit the answer right on the nose, but if you have heard enough comment from fellow soldiers, you're probably pretty certain that you've caught the drift of their opinion.

Men have been trying for centuries to find ways of gauging public opinion. American history is peppered with incidents in which somebody guessed wrong about what people were thinking—all the way from George III who thought our ancestors would take a Stamp Tax and like it down to a man named Adolf Hitler who had us sized up as a people too soft to go to war. Yet methods of measuring public opinion are neither magical nor mysterious. They never have been. It's an age-old idea that the best way to find out what people are thinking is to ask questions of them.

When the local sage sitting on a cracker barrel at the general store tells you his community is in favor of a new roof for the schoolhouse, does he know what he is talking

about? Probably he has heard and noted the views on the subject expressed by the stream of local citizens who have dropped in at the store for weeks past. It's an old-fashioned way of opinion polling, but it can be pretty sound.

Likewise, when your Congressman returns to Washington and announces that he will support the majority view in his home district on the new tax bill, is he just uttering words or does he have something to go on? More than likely he bases his remarks on talks with a large number of people back home. He may not be able to say what the majority view on any particular bill is within a few percentage points, but he believes that he has discovered the views of the majority or of those whose support is most important to him.

Nothing is more unjust or capricious than public opinion.

*William Hazlitt*

Similarly, political reporters of big city newspapers have long made a practice of touring the country before elections in an effort to find out the drift of opinion. Afterward they base their reports to the public on a large number of chats and interviews with persons in various social and economic classes. Often their predictions prove correct. Sometimes they fall wide of the mark, for the chances of error in their method of sampling the population are great. They cannot be sure that the persons to whom they talk really represent the rank and file of the voters.

### ***How accurate was the old way?***

Such rule-of-thumb methods of finding out what the public thinks about its problems allow almost anyone to set himself up as an expert on public opinion. They give anyone

with an ax to grind a chance to claim public support. The announcements often made by representatives of special interests, for instance, that "business believes" thus and so, that "labor feels," that "the farmers demand," or even that the "American people insist," may possibly be based on a poll of some sort. Or they may actually be unsupported statements which greatly exaggerate or twist the real opinion of the public. For unless we are told how and on what basis such conclusions were reached, we have no way of testing how reliable these sweeping statements are. And unless reasonably accurate means are used to find out what the public's opinion on current issues is, even the sincere and honest forecaster of opinion is likely to make serious mistakes in his predictions.

The proverbial wisdom of the populace in the streets, on the roads, and in the markets, instructs the ear of him who studies man more fully than a thousand rules ostentatiously arranged.

Anonymous, 1804

Equally tricky are attempts to predict the trend of public opinion on the basis of the public's views in years gone by. Public opinion is not fixed or static. It changes with the times, and big shifts in opinion may result from new situations or the effect of recent events. A trend of opinion throughout several generations may rapidly give way to new forces. Pearl Harbor blacked out isolationism in a few hours.

## WHAT ARE PUBLIC OPINION POLLS?

MODERN POLLING METHODS are not yet perfect, but close students of the subject believe that properly conducted they come closer to the right answers than the older and less scientific ways of feeling the public pulse.

By 1936 the public became aware of so-called "public opinion polls." And not long after that some people were calling them a threat to democracy. They were said to be a new way of measuring the public's view. Actually, the polls were based on the same old theory of asking questions, though that wasn't of course the whole story.

Soon many began to wonder how summaries of opinion could be made when only a few thousand people in the country are ever questioned on any one issue. People began asking over and over again: "I wonder how these polls are made and how accurate they may be? I've never been interviewed by them, and I've never known or even heard of anyone who was!"

The pollers are willing to explain their system. The ABC's of their methods are widely known and are not hard to understand.

### ***How widespread is their use?***

Day after day polls dealing with questions about public affairs and private business are being conducted throughout the United States. Opinion polling has also spread to England, Canada, Australia, Sweden, and France.

In the United States several national polls on public questions are operated by endowed and privately owned organizations. Departments of the federal government like the Department of Agriculture and the War Department carry on opinion surveys. Two state-wide polls are actively in the field. At least two municipal polls are in operation, attempting to find out for citizens and civic leaders the popular opinions on local issues. The universities and many unofficial organizations are using polling methods to study and to improve the polls and gather information on social problems.

Private business and industry have adopted the polling device for studying their own problems. Through it busi-

nessmen attempt to test markets and the success of their advertising, to investigate the public's opinion of their products, and to examine many other problems of policy.

The motion-picture industry uses polls continually to test the popularity of various films. Advertising agencies poll prospective users of commercial products for information to use in advertising campaigns. The newspapers, the radio industry, and the magazines study reading and listening habits by interviewing samples of their followers. Public relations men in industry employ polling methods to lay a foundation for their dealings with the public. In short, business and industry have adopted the polling devices in the belief that persons and institutions which depend on the public for support or livelihood must keep in close touch with the public's wants and wishes.

The polls are doubtless here to stay. Just how do they work? What can we really learn from them? Can polls do what is expected of them?

## HOW ARE POLLS MADE?

THE MODERN POLLS usually take great care to select and to interview a small part or "sample" of the population. In this respect they differ from older and less scientific ways of feeling the public pulse. To ask questions of a majority of the country's adult population, or of even a majority in a large city, would be too big and costly a job. It is usually possible to interview only a very small part of the people. But the part or sample of the population which is finally interviewed must be made up of all types—it must represent the same kinds of people who make up the entire population. This is the crucial point, because an accurate "miniature" of the population should reflect the opinions of the whole population.

Those who uphold the reliability of opinion polls say that

if an accurate miniature, consisting for example of 2,500 persons, is interviewed at random, the chances are 99 out of 100 that the answers will vary no more than about 3 percent from the opinions of the whole population. Likewise, they claim that when an accurate sample of 1,000 persons is interviewed, the chances are about 99 out of 100 that the answers will not differ by more than 4 to 5 percent from the answers of the whole population.

So the first requirement of a trustworthy poll is the selection of an accurate sample or miniature of the population. A homely illustration of sampling might be that of a cook making soup. He stirs the broth thoroughly and then dips out a spoonful to test the contents of the whole kettle. He doesn't need to drink all or most of the soup to judge the



A spoonful will tell the taste as well as drinking it all.

taste. A spoonful will do the job. Likewise, the grain inspector chooses a test sample from the contents of a bin or carload. Crop estimates by the federal government are not made by counting, for example, all ears of corn grown in the United States—that would be impossible, of course—but by judging yields on the basis of fair samples.

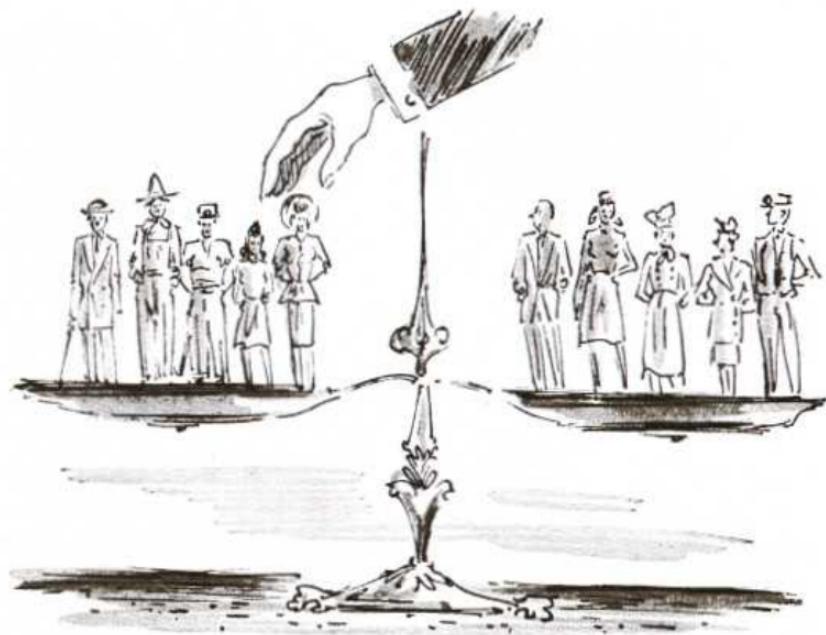
### ***How many are questioned?***

The size of the sample used in opinion polling naturally affects the accuracy of the results. Many nation-wide surveys are being made on the basis of some 2,500 to 5,000 interviews. If figures are to be presented by states also, or for the different groups in the sample—as, for example, members of labor unions—then the total sample must be increased to assure a big enough sample of each of these parts or subgroups. A sample of 2,500 may be large enough for nation-wide figures, for instance, but if figures from the same survey for each of the forty-eight states were reported, they would be based on samples which average only a little more than 50. The samples for each state would probably be too small.

It is an old rule that the smaller the sample the greater the chances of error. Nevertheless, the *size* of the sample is not as important to experienced pollers as the *representativeness* of the sample. A large sample, carelessly chosen, can lead to greater error than a properly selected small sample. The main question to the poller is, therefore: Is the sample a good cross section of the population? In other words, does the sample include the various types of people who make up the whole population? This is the key point.

### ***How is the sample set up?***

There are several ways in which the sample may be set up. The two most commonly used by polling organizations to get a proper cross section of the population are known as



**Samples should include all types that make up the population.**

(1) the "controlled sample" method and (2) the "area sampling" method.

*Controlled sample.* The controlled sample is more commonly used. The samples are carefully set up or "controlled" so that they include all the different types of people—*butcher, baker, candlestickmaker, and so forth*—that make up the whole population. Each interviewer is assigned the exact number and types of persons he is to question.

What types of people should be included to get a cross section of public opinion? Why doesn't everyone react in the same way to public questions? Does a poor man think differently about politics than a rich man? If so, a sample should have both poor men and rich men. Are people in

the South likely to think differently about some current issues than people in the North or on the West Coast? If so, people from all sections of the country should be included in a national sample. Are farmers likely to size up public problems differently from city people? If so, then farmers should be interviewed as well as city dwellers.

The polling organizations have studied this problem for many years and applied mathematical techniques. They haven't found out all the answers, but they believe that among the main influences that make a person what he is and cause one person to think differently about current issues than another are:

1. The section of the country he lives in—East, South, North, Middle West, or West.
2. The type of community he lives in—big city, small city, village, or farm.
3. His standard of living—poor, average, or wealthy.
4. Whether he is a man or woman.
5. How old he is.

In addition, interviewers are usually told to find out how much schooling each person has and what his race and religion are. These points also have a bearing on a person's views. A poller must consider all these factors and many more.

At any rate, before the sample can be made up accurately, facts about the population must be known. Figures must be gathered from the latest census reports and other sources so that it can be known what the make-up of the miniature or cross section should be. When the facts and figures have been collected, then the sample can be arranged so that the same percentage of men and women, different age groups, economic classes, people who live in the big cities or on farms can be included.

If 20 percent of the people in the United States are farmers, then the sample question must consist 20 percent of farmers. If 30 percent of the people live in cities, of one million or over, then 30 percent of the interviews should be made among residents of large cities. If 53 percent of the people are 40 or over, then that percentage of persons past 40 years of age should be interviewed.

Notice the table on page 11. It shows the percentages for a national sample of adults used in the fall of 1944 by the National Opinion Research Center of Denver, Colorado. The number of persons in the sample was 2,523.

After the sample has been made up, each interviewer is given a list or order which calls for answers to questions from certain types of people. When the answers obtained by all the interviewers are added up, say the upholders of public opinion polls, they should reflect the opinion of the entire population.

The interviewers find out from each person interviewed what his occupation is, how much schooling he has had, whether he has a telephone or owns a car, and other facts. These figures, after they are added up for the whole sample, can be compared with the known facts in the entire population about occupations or maybe about telephone and car ownership. If the percentage of car and telephone owners in the sample, for instance, is about the same as the percentage of car and telephone owners in the whole population, then the sample checks with one accuracy test.

*The area sample.* The area sample is coming into greater favor each year. It calls for a cross section of areas rather than of persons. In this case, facts about different types of areas such as counties, townships, or election districts are gathered from the census and other sources. For example, the polling organization gathers figures on counties that contain big cities, those that include medium-sized cities, those that have only small towns within their bor-

# A NATIONAL CROSS SECTION OR SAMPLE

Total		2,523	
SEX	Per-cent	Per-cent	
Men	46	Northeast	27
Women	54	Middle West	32
		South	29
		West	12
AGE		SIZE OF PLACE	
21 to 39	47	Cities of 1,000,000 population	28
40 and over	53	Cities of 50,000 to 1,000,000	24
RACE		Cities of 2,500 to 50,000 (includes places of less than 2,500 not considered urban)	30
White	91	Farms	18
Negro	9		
OCCUPATION		POLITICAL PREFERENCE, 1940 ELECTIONS	
White-collar workers	34	Roosevelt voters	38
Manual workers	37	Willkie voters	21
Service workers	10	Nonvoters	41
Farmers	19		
ECONOMIC LEVEL		MARITAL STATUS	
Upper	15	Single	10
Middle	53	Married	77
Lower	32	Widowed, separated, divorced	13
EDUCATION			
College	18	NUMBER IN HOUSEHOLD	
High school	39	1-member family	10
Grade school	43	2-member family	25
		3-member family	25
		4-member family	19
		5-member family	21

ders, and those that are mainly made up of farms. These figures are collected for the East, West, and other parts of the country. Some of each type of county are picked to make up the sample. A number of small areas such as townships and sections in the rural counties and blocks in the cities are chosen so that the sum of the areas is an accurate sample of all the areas in the country.

Interviewers are instructed to call on every household or perhaps every third or fourth household in the sections or blocks that are finally selected. This method has been devised because it allows the interviewer little or no choice among the persons whom he is to visit and therefore has certain advantages over the use of the controlled sample. Also, some observers believe that it tends to avoid bias and mistakes resulting from the use of the interviewer's personal judgment.

### ***How are the questions phrased?***

Selecting a good sample is very important, but careless phrasing of questions and the use of poorly trained and supervised interviewers can ruin the poll no matter how scientifically the sample has been made up.

The questions must be neutral. A "loaded" question which suggests an answer may cause serious error in the results. For example, take the question, "Should employers be forced to negotiate with union labor?" Is it a fair question? Couldn't many meanings be read into this question simply because of the word "force"? Would you know for sure what the answers to this question really meant? Likewise the blunt question, "Do you read any books?" would yield meaningless answers because it is too general, it allows for too many interpretations, and it might hurt the pride of persons who are interviewed.

Questions must be clear, so that people cannot misunderstand their meanings. For example, in the course of one



**"Have you stopped beating your wife? Yes or No."**

survey it was found that the word "salvage" meant many things during the war to different people. To some it suggested "paper and tin can drives." To a few it had to do with "bringing the boys home from the front." Therefore, to have used that word in a final survey would have resulted in error.

The questions must deal with matters which the people who are interviewed can be expected to answer properly. Complicated and technical questions, or those dealing with subjects on which they have little information, may yield meaningless answers.

As a result of these and other requirements of a good set of questions, the polling organizations should pre-test their questions by trying them out on a small number of persons rather than relying entirely on the judgment of their own staff. Only after the questions have been properly tested can they be incorporated in a final questionnaire. Many

polling surveys are faulty because the questions have not been carefully worded and have not been tested.

### ***What kinds of questions are asked?***

Exact forms of the questions depend also on the type of information which the survey proposes to gather. The most common form is one which requires only a yes or no answer. It is particularly useful when issues have been before the people and when they have probably already formed an opinion about them.

For instance, the American Institute of Public Opinion (Gallup Poll) asked the simple question, "Do you believe that war bonds are a good investment?" Answers were:

Yes .....	91%
No .....	5%
Undecided .....	4%

Open or free questions which allow the persons interviewed to express themselves freely and at length are sometimes used, especially when it is important to find out the various lines of thinking which are current on an issue. For instance, workers in certain industries might be interviewed and allowed to express themselves freely on the conditions under which they work, in an effort to find out the most important personnel problems in the industry from the employees' angle.

Another form is the so-called multiple-choice question, or questions grouped into a check list. Here the persons interviewed are allowed to make a choice among a number of answers. The multiple-choice questions are useful, for example, when it is important to know how strongly people feel about a problem, how well they are informed about an issue, or which viewpoint they hold among those listed.

Here is an example of this form of question as it was used by the National Opinion Research Center:

"Which of the following statements comes closest to de-

scribing how you feel, on the whole, about the people who live in Germany (Japan)?"

1. The German (Japanese) people will always want to go to war to make themselves as powerful as possible.
2. The German (Japanese) people may not like war, but they have shown that they are too easily led into war by powerful leaders.
3. The German (Japanese) people do not like war. If they could have the same chance as people in other countries, they would become good citizens of the world.

One experienced member of a polling organization has summed up the objectives of questions on a typical issue as follows:

1. Questions which will discover how many persons have heard of the issue, read of it, thought about it.
2. Questions to get at the direction of popular thinking about the issue.
3. Questions to bring out the intensity with which people are thinking about the issue—how strongly they feel about it.
4. Yes-no questions to find out which side of the fence the people are on.

### ***How are interviewers trained and supervised?***

Most of the modern polling surveys are based on personal interviews. The Gallup Poll, for example, employs from 800 to 1,000 interviewers throughout the country.

Personal interviews are considered preferable to surveys made through the mails because some classes of persons are more likely to answer by mail than are others. It has been found, for instance, that persons in the upper economic levels are more likely to answer by mail than those on lower levels. As a result, the sample cannot be controlled as

## PHRASING OF QUESTIONS IS VERY IMPORTANT FORTUNE SURVEY..APRIL 1941

### ANSWERS TO STRAIGHT UNLOADED QUESTIONS

"If Hitler wins, do you think he will be able to invade the United States?"

YES.....	33 %
NO .....	56.1 %
DON'T KNOW .....	10.9%

### ANSWERS TO SAME QUESTION RESTATED WITH AN INTERVENTIONIST BIAS

"If Hitler subdues Europe and gets the British Fleet in his possession, he will be able to invade us."

AGREE .....	52.9%
DISAGREE.....	33.9%
DON'T KNOW .....	13.2%

### ANSWERS TO THE SAME QUESTION RESTATED WITH AN ISOLATIONIST BIAS

"There is little chance of Hitler invading us across 3000 miles of ocean when he hasn't even been able to cross 20 miles of Channel."

AGREE .....	47.2%
DISAGREE.....	42.3%
DON'T KNOW .....	10.5%

closely when mail questionnaires are used as is possible when personal calls are made.

But good interviewing is an art which calls for careful training and supervision. Bias, and hence error, can result if the interviewer isn't neutral or if he influences the answers of the person he is questioning. Interviewers are usually picked on the recommendation of local leaders. Their social, economic, and political leanings are studied in an effort to select those who are likely to do their work objectively and honestly. A check on the interviewer is usually made in the course of the analyses of polling data to find out if he followed instructions exactly and how his work compares with that of the others.

## **WHY DO POLLS GET DIFFERENT RESULTS?**

IT IS GENERALLY AGREED that the usefulness of public opinion polls depends on the reliability of their results. Many students believe that polling has proved a reliable guide to what Americans think or how they feel about certain issues and that the results obtained when a sample of the population is interviewed may be "blown up" to indicate what all Americans think or feel. On the other hand, some students of opinion polls declare that this method of obtaining national views cannot attain great accuracy because the sample, no matter how carefully selected, will not reflect the entire range of individual ideas or feelings that characterize 138,000,000 Americans.

Polling, however, is not an exact science. Since only samples of the population are interviewed, final figures are always subject to a margin of error. The sampling method cannot produce exact figures like those found in the laboratory of the chemist or the physicist. People of a community cannot be subjected to precise analytical measurements.

Exactly what accounts for an opinion held by a person or for his personality cannot be isolated and studied as precisely as the elements which make up a chemical compound.

Nevertheless, if properly done, polls are said to result in figures which are very close to the nation-wide average. This belief has to some extent been borne out by sampling the voters before an election. Unless the division of opinion is about 50-50, with a good poll the figures can be expected to call the turn on the winner or the popular side of the issue. A candidate getting about 53 percent or more of the vote can be picked to win without much question.

### ***Does chance enter in?***

Mere chance accounts for the normal margin of error. These chance factors have been studied under what is known as the "theory of probabilities." With a little patience anyone can test this theory, using dice or pennies. And very few crapshooters keep their shirts who haven't a working knowledge of this law—though they may call it intuition!

Suppose you decide to find out how many heads and tails you will get if you toss four pennies at the same time. The pennies have only two sides and it can be proved that you are more likely to get 2 heads and 2 tails than any other combination. That is, you can expect to get 4 heads or 4 tails from one-sixteenth of the throws, 3 heads and 1 tail or 3 tails and 1 head from one-fourth of the throws, and 2 heads and 2 tails three-eighths of the time.

Suppose, however, that when you toss the pennies the first time you get 4 heads. You toss them the second time and maybe, to your surprise, you get 4 heads again! Of course you wouldn't come to the conclusion that the pennies have only heads and no tails. You not only know otherwise, but know that you haven't tossed the pennies often enough to be sure of such a conclusion. *Your sample isn't*



Intuition, or the "theory of probabilities"

*big enough.* But if you toss the four pennies over and over again, recording the combination of heads and tails you get after each toss, you will find that you get closer and closer to the figures you can expect to get theoretically. The margin of error will continue to decrease as the number of tosses (sample) increases. If you keep up the tosses until you have made 1,000 or more, you should get the expected results within a small margin of error.

\*The same rules and similar chances of error operate when you carefully sample the population in an opinion survey. In other words, even if the sampling and interviewing have been perfectly carried out, it can be proved by mathematics that chance can cause small margins of error. For example, it can be shown that in a sample of 1,000, taken at random, the chances are 95 out of 100 that the error will be less than 3 percentage points, although in the other 5 times the

error may be larger. The chances are 99 out of 100, however, that the error will be less than 4 percent. If the sample is 2,500, taken at random, the margin of error is about 2 percent in the first case, and about 3 percent in the second. This means that if the same questions were asked of the whole population, the figures would be likely to fall within a few percent of those obtained by a careful use of the sampling method. The risk is small. It is considered a reasonably safe gamble.

### *Are the differences significant?*

It follows that if two or more polls get answers to the same questions which differ by no more than these normal errors they have, for all practical purposes, achieved the same results. It would be mere chance, however, if they came out exactly the same percentages. If the polls announce results which differ by a larger margin than the normal error permits, then the difference is significant, and is caused by some other reason besides chance. The samples may not have been equally true cross sections of the population, or the questions may have been worded differently in each poll.

The champions of polling methods say that the evidence is strong that the major polls get the same results for all practical purposes. Moreover, their figures tend to vary less and less from true figures—such as election returns—as years go by. In 1936 the Gallup Poll was 6 percent wide of the actual percentage division of the votes cast for Landon and Roosevelt; it was 4.5 percent off the mark in 1940, and less than 2 percent off in 1944. However, in 1944 the Gallup Poll was much more off the mark in guessing the outcome of the electoral votes. It indicated a fairly close race—so far as electoral votes are concerned—between Roosevelt and Dewey, but actually Roosevelt obtained 432 votes and Dewey only 99. Thus, its state sampling was much less accurate than its national sampling.

The *Fortune* (Elmo Roper) Poll has varied only 1 percent from the results in each of these elections.

The pollers claim that these results are better than more haphazard methods used in the past. They far surpass, for example, the *Literary Digest* poll of 1936 which was not based on a carefully selected cross section of the population and which resulted in an error of 19 percent. That error helped to end the existence of the *Literary Digest*.

To summarize the means by which one can try to tell the difference between reliable and unreliable polls:

1. Does the polling organization explain its procedures to the public so that anyone can determine whether it follows reliable practices? Is the organization willing to submit its data to impartial analysis?
2. The reader should examine carefully the questions and results of polls which come to his attention. Are the questions neutral in tone or are they "loaded"? Do the questions deal with real and present situations? Are they merely intended to bring out opinions on the basis of assumptions? Do the questions and answers deal with past, present, or future situations?
3. Who is sponsoring the polls? Is the sponsor an organization interested, for example, in research or in the welfare of the general public? Or does the organization gather data furthering the interests of some special group?
4. If the poll is conducted by a private organization, does it depend for its existence on special interests? Does it depend for its existence on support from the general public? The major polls can maintain public confidence only so long as they continue to be accurate within the limits of chance errors.
5. Do the privately owned polls which regularly announce their findings undergo an audit or checkup of their results? At least two organizations have given funds for the study of modern polling methods. The funds are used partly for research and analyzing figures supplied by the major polls.

# HOW U.S. PUBLIC OPINION IN PREWAR YEARS

## JANUARY 1936

Would you be willing to fight or have a member of your family fight.....



	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
... in case we were attacked on our own territory?	80.3%	15.6%	4.1%
... in case the Philippines were attacked?	23.8%	66.8%	9.4%
... in case a foreign power tried to seize land in Central or South America?	17.4%	73.8%	8.8%
... in case our foreign trade were seriously interfered with by force?	34.4%	53.8%	11.8%

## JULY 1937

Do you believe there is likely to be a major European or Asiatic war in the next two or three years?



**YES** ..... 46.9%  
**NO** ..... 29.2%  
**DON'T KNOW** .. 23.9%

If yes, do you think the U. S. is likely to be drawn in?

**YES** ..... 46.6%  
**NO** ..... 36.6%  
**DON'T KNOW** .. 16.8%

# SHIFTED IN RESPONSE TO EVENTS ABROAD

## DECEMBER 1939

Favor entering war now.....	2.5%
Fight only if Germany seems likely to win unless we did.....	14.7%
Favor policy of economic discrimination against Germany.....	8.9%
Favor maintaining strict neutrality.....	67.4%
Find some way to support Germany.....	.2%
Other.....	2.4%
Don't know.....	3.9%



## AUGUST 1941

Those who think this is our war are wrong, and the people of this country should resist to the last ditch any move that would lead us further toward war.

A lot of mistakes have brought us close to a war that isn't ours, but now it's done, and we should support, in full, the Government's program.

While at first it looked as if this wasn't our war, it now looks as though we should back England till Hitler is beaten.

It's our war as well as England's, and we should have been in there fighting with her long before this.

Don't know.



16.3%

22.4%

41.3% } 53.7%  
For military intervention

12.4% }

7.6%

6. Does the poll usually attempt to go beyond simple yes-no questions? Does it try to arrive at an understanding of the public's attitude on questions? In addition to giving figures on mere division of opinion, does it try to find (a) what interest the public has in the issue, (b) what information the public has on the issue, (c) what reasons people have for their viewpoints, and (d) how intensely people feel about the issue?

## IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW PUBLIC OPINION?

IS IT IMPORTANT in a democratic nation to find out how the public feels about popular issues? If so, should the public's viewpoints be found out somehow when important issues actually face the country? Or are the people too badly informed or indifferent to have dependable opinions?

Public opinion is, in fact, recognized as an important force in statecraft. In countries ruled by dictatorships every effort is made to keep the public in line by allowing only one point of view to be heard. No free play of public opinion is permitted.

### *What's public opinion to a democracy?*

In a democracy like ours it is an accepted idea that the public which is called upon to make important decisions at the ballot box must be kept informed of popular issues. It is also an important principle of our governmental system that public policies are decided upon by the people. Popular control over lawmaking bodies, over executives in the government, and over domestic and foreign policy is a basic idea in our political society. The people are the source of power. Hence their opinions should mold the action of government.

The successful life of our government operating under these principles justifies our faith in the people's good judg-

ment. We believe that once the public's views on public issues are known and acted upon, our government will be improved rather than damaged. It is often said that only those who distrust the public and the soundness of its judgment need fear an expression of its views.

### ***Do elections tell enough?***

Can we get enough information to keep us and our representatives informed of the trend of public opinion from elections held at regular intervals? Are our public problems so simple that they can be solved merely by a show of hands? That question was raised in the last century by a close student of American government, James Bryce, British ambassador to the United States. In his *American Commonwealth*, Bryce made the following comment:

"The obvious weakness of government by opinion is the difficulty of ascertaining it. . . . The one positive test applicable is that of an election, and an election can at best do no more than test the division of opinion between two or three great parties. . . . An American statesman is in no danger of consciously running counter to public opinion, but how is he to discover whether any particular opinion is making or losing way, how is he to gauge the voting strength its advocates can put forth, or the moral authority which its advocates exert? Elections cannot be further multiplied, for they are too numerous already."

Bryce wrote on this subject before the modern polls had been developed. Nevertheless, he looked forward to the time when in a democracy the viewpoint of the people could "become ascertainable at all times." Regular reports on the people's views would stimulate the discussion of public affairs. They would assist, therefore, in the development of public opinion, and according to Bryce,

"It is the existence of such a public opinion as this, the practice of freely and constantly reading, talking, and judging public political rights, that gives to popular government that educated, and stimulative power which is so frequently claimed as its highest merit."

## ***Do polls stimulate discussion?***

Can the polls contribute, then, to this stimulating discussion of public affairs by focusing attention on current issues? The Gallup Poll, for example, in the summer of 1943 inquired into public viewpoints on social security legislation. Asked whether the Social Security program should be changed to include farmers, domestic servants, government employees, and professional persons, the persons interviewed answered:

Yes .....	64%
No .....	19%
Undecided .....	17%

Similarly, the polls have tried to find out how much information people have on public affairs. Early in 1945 the Gallup Poll called attention to the lack of knowledge among American voters on the machinery of government. The results showed up a gap in the public's knowledge of government which might be filled by the information agencies that reach the people of the country. Only 38 percent of the persons interviewed throughout the country knew the length of a representative's elected term of office in Congress and only 30 percent knew how much a Congressman is paid.

On the other hand, the *Fortune* survey in a poll conducted in 1944 tried to find out what people thought were the big public issues at that time. A cross section of the population was asked, "Which two or three of these things do you think are the most important to America?" The choices and the results were:

What should be done about preventing unemployment after the war .....	68.2%
The part the U. S. should play in world affairs after the war .....	59.3%
Peace terms to be given Germany.....	38.5%
Future social security provisions.....	32.2%
Don't know .....	4.2%

If this poll accurately reflected the public's views, could it have stimulated further discussion of these topics and informed government officials of the trend of popular opinion? Is this kind of information useful to the public?

## **WHAT TYPES OF INFORMATION CAN POLLS FIND?**

THE POLLS can find out what people are thinking about important public questions. According to their champions, the polls are fact-finding devices which help to keep the public well informed. The polls can keep the public in touch with important shifts in public opinion, it is said, and therefore in the shifts of forces which decide where the political, economic, and social power in this country lies.

Critics, however, point out that polling, in addition to being restricted by the small size of the sample, is subject to the bias of interviewers and those who analyze the data, and that in some instances also the questions may not be well or carefully phrased. Some discount in the reliability of opinion surveys must therefore be made.

Despite the skepticism of polling practices voiced by some sociologists and economists, polls are being used more and more to gather facts and also opinions. The Bureau of the Census uses the sampling method, for example, to gather currently factual information about the labor supply in the United States. Other organizations try to find out the opinions of people on any of the day's significant issues. Information which the polling organizations attempt to gather can be illustrated by the following questions:

1. What are the wants and wishes of the public?
2. What are the people thinking about?
3. What is troubling the public?
4. What are the opinions of people on current problems?

5. To what extent and in what respects are people badly informed about current issues?
6. What are the voting habits of people, in general, and of special groups within the population?
7. What are the differences of opinion among people in various geographic areas in the country, among political groups, among groups representing different social and economic levels?

The comment is often made that elections do not answer these questions fully. They provide no means of testing the public will between elections. They do not show clearly what the public thinks of current issues when it votes for the candidates. Their results can be misinterpreted. Users of polling methods say that opinion surveys can fill this gap in the information which reaches the public.

### ***What value are pre-election polls?***

Election predictions are dramatic tests of polling methods and the reputation of the pollers has come to be based largely on them. Elections offer a severe test of the poller's methods. He must make two predictions: which people will vote and how they intend to vote. He cannot merely sample a cross section of the adult population. He must attempt to find out the opinions of those who *will vote* at the election. He must attempt to overcome the influences resulting from weather conditions on election day and other factors which will affect the turnout. He must study the influences exerted by political machines, by eleventh hour campaigning, and the possibility of interest or lack of interest in the election among important parts of the voting population. If his predictions forecast the viewpoints of the adult population rather than the preference of the people who actually voted, perhaps more accurately than the election itself, and if they vary widely from the election returns, he will

have failed in the eyes of the public. And whenever the election is closely contested, an error of a few percentage points might cause him to predict the winner wrongly. *The main purpose of polling organizations is not, however, to make election forecasts.*

To be sure, they offer a testing ground for finding out why people vote as they do, when and on what basis they make up their minds, what relationships exist between their votes for certain candidates and current issues, and what differences of political opinion exist among various groups and types of people. The elections also give pollers a chance to study to what extent the voters appear to be affected by political platforms, speeches, and various other forms of publicity.

It would be difficult to show that the 164 election forecasts made by one polling organization during nine years



**The main purpose of polling organizations is not to make forecasts.**

up to the end of 1944 had in themselves served an important public purpose other than to provide a public test of polling techniques. If a poller can forecast elections correctly time after time within a few percentage points, can he be sure that the accuracy of his public opinion polls conducted with the same methods on social, political, and economic questions will be high?

The answer is not simple. The polling of voting behavior is relatively easy and not subject to question. It is like counting a show of hands at a meeting. Polling people on current issues involves complications. Asking people, for example, whether they favor a hard or soft peace for Japan requires them to think about the matter before giving an answer. What does a hard peace mean? A soft peace? Many of those interviewed will answer only to be obliging even though they may not have enough information to give an answer. You will notice that polls often report a percentage who "don't know" or "haven't any opinion" about the question asked. This percentage may be a key to the meaning of the poll's results.

Trust not the populace; the crowd is many-minded.

Attributed to Phocylides, 560 B.C.

### ***Are polls reaching new fields?***

*Surveys based on current issues which are not necessarily connected with a forthcoming election are, then, the particular field which the polls are cultivating.* The area of public health is an example. Are people poorly informed about public health? In what respect is more information likely to result in better standards of health and the saving of lives? In what localities are the needs peculiar? What public health measures is the public willing to support? To

answer these questions requires a survey among the people. Questions must be asked and answers recorded.

The people have the right and duty to decide on matters of policy. Government officials need advice from the people on questions of policy. They can carry on their work more confidently and intelligently if they know the public attitude. Whether we should have a social security program may well be the subject of a public opinion poll. On the other hand, the detail of just how the social security policy shall be administered is not likely to be a suitable subject for an opinion survey. The public cannot be expected to serve as a congress of experts for considering matters which it doesn't understand or which can be understood only by persons who have special knowledge of the problem. Technical details and the means for carrying out public policies will have to be left to experts or persons who have had specialized training.

The pressure of public opinion is like the pressure of the atmosphere; you can't see it—but, all the same, it is sixteen pounds to the square inch. *James Russell Lowell*

## DO POLLS FORM PUBLIC OPINION?

AN ATTEMPT can be made to use polls to influence rather than to reflect public opinion. Polls can be manipulated to give a false picture of public opinion. Moreover, there is evidence that since polls are believed to be reliable and useful, the public could be misled by unreliable surveys.

### *What influence have they?*

But the major polling organizations argue that the polls exert an influence on the public in much the same manner that any book, any set of facts, or discussion of public af-

fairs does. Opinion surveys can, doubtless, help the public by stimulating discussion of current problems.

The public itself—if we are to judge by a poll on the subject—has a lot of confidence in opinion sampling. Asked if they think the polls “are a good thing or bad thing in our country,” 73 percent said, “a good thing,” while 21 percent admitted they didn’t know.

Early in 1945 the Gallup Poll released results of a survey which showed that a majority of voters favored a “work or fight” bill rather than attempts to get people into war jobs by voluntary methods. The division of opinion was reported as follows:

Favor keeping voluntary methods.....	39%
Favor drafting people.....	53%
Uncertain .....	8%

This subject was being widely discussed and debated at the time and the results of the poll intensified the discussion.

Was it good or bad that this evidence was made public? Could the figures influence public opinion? If so, was it a bad influence? Should influences on public opinion be restricted to radio talks, newspaper and magazine articles, pamphlets, public speakers, and other means of reaching the public and not include the results of public opinion surveys? Can you support the argument that it is against public interest to know what a cross section of the population says it believes about an urgent public question?

The modern polls are designed to report—they do not usually pretend to solve problems. They try to record, not to form opinion or solve highly technical problems. They may exercise the same indirect power on policymakers and the rank and file that any published studies exert.

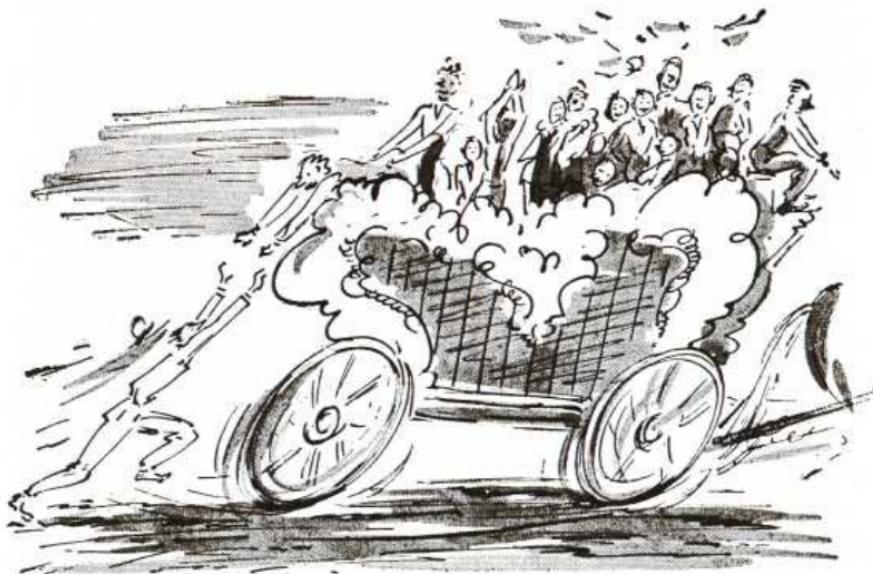
### ***Do they help load the bandwagon?***

Whether the public is actually swayed by the results of opinion polls is hard to say. One test is provided by the

election polls. If opinion surveys exert an important influence on the public, then the division of opinion during an election campaign should be in the same direction as the polling results. The leading candidate should gain in strength as the campaign proceeds. Voters who hadn't made up their minds or who had favored the opposing candidate should be found climbing on the leading candidate's bandwagon. Can we find any evidence that there is such a trend?

In 1936 the *Literary Digest* poll showed Landon winning by a landslide. Landon was badly beaten in the election. In the 1940 election one major poll showed that Willkie was gaining strength in the final stages of the campaign. Perhaps he was, but he lost the election.

During the presidential election campaign of 1944 the Gallup Poll published figures showing that 71 percent of a



**Within local areas the bandwagon appeal may actually have an effect.**

cross section of all voters thought Roosevelt would win the election, 17 percent thought Dewey would win, and 12 percent were undecided. But the civilian vote in the election ran about 53 to 47 in favor of Roosevelt.

Consequently major polling organizations argue that the "bandwagon theory" has not been supported by election data. In general, the public appeared to vote for its candidates even if the odds were against them. The people did not seem to be swung in significant numbers one way or another by opinion survey data.

### ***What do studies reveal?***

Studies in local areas have indicated, however, that the bandwagon appeal actually does operate during a political campaign, although a real effect on the outcome of elections has not been proved. A study of the 1940 presidential election in Erie County, Ohio, for instance, showed that some persons who changed their intention to vote for a candidate during the campaign said that they had been influenced by the polls. The number was small. Nevertheless, the study showed that there may have been some bandwagon influence in this case, however small the final effects on the election.

Is it dangerous for the public to follow the polls as a measure of public opinion? No such danger has been proved. On the contrary, disinterested opinion leaders have not hesitated to study data resulting from opinion surveys and to use them freely in public discussions. Polling results are published widely in reputable periodicals and in articles by conscientious students of public affairs. Results of opinion surveys are included in studies such as the *Foreign Policy Reports*, not as conclusive evidence, but as contributions to an understanding of public attitudes. This would indicate that many students of public affairs take the results of polls seriously.

## SHOULD CONGRESSMEN RELY ON POLL RESULTS?

TO WHAT EXTENT should Congressmen rely on polling results to guide them in voting on legislation? Is it in the public interest to follow confidently the people's view of the issues? Is it important to correct the prevailing opinion on popular questions? In what manner, in view of polling results, can Congress best exert leadership?

Congressmen usually seek all possible advice before they arrive at their decisions. They want to use every means available for determining what the people want and what people believe about current issues. Public opinion polls can furnish the Congressmen with one form of evidence which they can use together with evidence from other sources. A Congressman would probably not rely solely on the polls for an estimate of public opinion, but he could be expected to make use of every evidence of public opinion.

### ***Is the public always right?***

Critics of the polls argue that the public's opinions should not alone be taken into consideration by Congressmen in making their decision, since the public as a whole lacks the information necessary to forming sound opinions on many important issues. The polls themselves show that a third of the nation has but a vague idea of a tariff, and most Americans cannot name a single provision of the Atlantic Charter, nor are they aware that the United States received reverse lend-lease aid from Great Britain. And about 40 percent are confused as to who such well-known public figures as Thurman Arnold, Philip Murray, John L. Lewis, or Eric Johnston are.

Published results of polls have shown time after time that the public favored a policy before Congress had acted upon it. Well-known instances are: repeal of the neutrality

act, lend-lease, preparedness, the need for more air power, conscription, and price and wage controls. This does not mean that Congressmen had not already thought deeply about these matters before the polls were taken. It may mean merely that Congress was inclined to study these questions with great care before committing itself or that it was awaiting some good evidence of the public viewpoint on these important questions.

### ***Is the minority important?***

Few persons would suggest that Congress should follow blindly the opinions of a majority of the public as they are revealed by modern polls.

In this connection, Gerald Johnson, one of the editors of the Baltimore *Sun* and a well-known historian says, "Sometimes a man in public office ought to take the unpopular side. If he cherishes some hope that it may not be so unpopular as it looks, it is easier for him to do his duty. But if public opinion were always measured precisely, no such doubts would be laid upon the man who must do what is right in spite of the wrath of his constituents."

Even if the polls were to become widely accepted as the best evidence of the public's views on current issues, Congressmen need not become robots. Otherwise, as one writer has remarked, "democratic government might as well be conducted by a roomful of \$25-a-week clerks, adding up the results of national referenda."

### ***Have polls a place in government?***

But polling results can show Congress how well the people are informed on public questions, how intensely they feel about specific issues, how fair and sensible is the public's reaction to government policy, how and why the people divide on these questions, and where the "sore spots" of public opinion are. With such information at hand, Con-

gress can use its best judgment to decide what course to take in the public interest. The polls are as important probably as pressure groups, newspapers, and other things which try to shape public opinion. They will be valuable to democracy only to the degree that our leaders are able to learn how to evaluate their results—that is, how to use and not to use them.

Late in December 1944, a Congressional committee which was investigating campaign expenditures made a critical investigation of polling data gathered by one of the major polls during the 1944 presidential campaign. The committee chairman's remarks which opened hearings on this subject included this comment:

"If polls can be useful to the Congress and to the Nation in determining attitudes on public questions, then certainly the mechanism by which the polls operate becomes of tremendous interest to the Congress because the Congress could be the first to benefit by the use of this information."

The technical committee which assisted the House committee in its investigation pointed out a number of defects in polling methods, yet reached the following conclusion:

"Modern scientific sampling technique can predict with striking accuracy the results which would be obtained if a complete canvass were made of the entire population. The use of scientific sampling methods in ascertaining public opinion constitutes an important contribution to the needs of a well-informed democratic society. . . . Scientific sampling and survey techniques now available, carefully and rigidly used, will yield information relating to public opinion and to economic, political and social matters, that is dependably accurate within relatively small margins of error, at great speed, and with low cost."

The interest in Congress shown by the investigation of polling methods may be taken as a straw in the wind. While the committee did not intend to accept without critical study the reliability of the polls, it nevertheless recognized the important part which the polls play in the discussion of social and political issues in the United States.

## SHOULD POLLS BE FINANCED AND USED BY FEDERAL AGENCIES?

THE USEFULNESS of polls to government agencies other than the legislative branch is already undergoing extensive tests. The Department of Agriculture has for several years made use of polling procedures to determine the attitude of farmers on matters affecting policies of the department. Likewise the Army, the Treasury Department, the Census Bureau, and other agencies are conducting surveys among parts of the population in which they are interested.

These agencies have assumed that if business throughout the country has found it profitable to use the sampling method of inquiring into public opinion, then this method also could be usefully applied in the art of government. For within about two weeks a sampling of public opinion can be made on any suitable subject. In other words, a referendum at small cost to the public can be made if for no other reason than to get the advice of the public on a problem.

Sometimes basic facts, such as are gathered by the Census Bureau in its regular reports on employment and unemployment are assembled quickly by the sampling method. Or administrators use polling devices to test their procedures, to find out how well their activities and their policies are understood, and to enlist the public's help in putting government programs into operation. For example, the attitude of farmers on the government's crop production and farm price policies has been the subject of official polls. Changes have been made in printed government forms as a result of evidence accumulated by surveys, and information has been released to the public to correct what polls showed to be "areas of public ignorance."

So long as polls, financed with public funds, are used for administrative rather than political purposes, are they dangerous to democratic processes? If they are carefully

conducted can they serve as means by which government keeps in touch with the people? Is it reasonable to expect that any organization which depends on the public for co-operation or support should make an effort to find out what the public thinks?

## **SHOULD AN UNBIASED CHECK BE MADE OF ALL POLLS?**

PERHAPS all polls on public questions will be looked upon with distrust by some people until they believe firmly that these surveys are above suspicion and that they are made as scientifically as up-to-date knowledge will permit. Should people be assured too that the polling organizations are not linked up with special interest groups? Would it be a service to the public and to the polls if regular check-ups of the results were made by some unbiased and expert group? Could the polls be expected to state that their methods have been passed upon by unbiased investigators?

Careful examination of results are already made of figures gathered by some major polls. These "audits" are somewhat like those made of bookkeeping records or accounts of business concerns and government offices. Similarly, audits could be made of all polls on public questions, perhaps under the guidance of expert statisticians who are not connected with the polls. And the techniques of sampling, of getting closer and closer to a cross section of national thought should be constantly perfected.

Actually any poll which turns out to be wrong or misleading may lose its standing with the public. The very existence of a poll depends on its record of accuracy. The *Literary Digest* folded after its grossly erroneous prediction of the 1936 elections. Would a careful and unbiased checkup of results be a forward step in the development of public opinion polling?

# TO THE DISCUSSION LEADER

Public opinion is important in democratic America, and the role of polls as a means of measuring that opinion is a subject that will interest nearly any discussion group.

Most of us like to know how other people think and feel about a great variety of subjects. Newspapers, magazines, books, and radio bring us the results of opinion polls. But how many of us know how opinion polls are taken, or how reliable they are, or what useful purposes they serve?

This pamphlet discusses how polls are made, why different polls produce varying results, what types of information these polls can obtain, and what some of the views are regarding the usefulness of polls. Readers of this pamphlet and discussion leaders are encouraged to prepare their own questions and raise them at a discussion meeting on "Are Opinion Polls Useful?"

## ***How can leaders arouse interest?***

When you have decided where and when your discussion meeting is to be held, you should consider ways of getting that information to persons who might like to attend your meeting. A group discussion of this subject will be news in your area. You should see that announcements are made in appropriate newspapers. You can have posters made and placed in conspicuous places—recreation rooms, libraries, and mess halls. You can post notices on bulletin boards. You can announce the meeting over a loud-speaker system. You can suggest that librarians display copies of this pamphlet and supplementary reading materials on a special table.

Copies of this pamphlet should be made available for leisure-time reading. This will arouse people's interest in

attending a discussion meeting on opinion polls. It will also enable them to evaluate more intelligently the information presented by your speakers. And it will prepare them to take a more active part in the discussion.

Your own careful planning of your meeting will be a big factor in making your discussion successful. If you plan a forum, panel, or symposium type of discussion, the selection of good speakers is very important. If you plan an informal discussion, then it is doubly important that you prepare thoroughly before the meeting. Such visual aids as a blackboard and perhaps some appropriate charts will probably prove helpful in whatever type of discussion you use.

### ***What kind of discussion meeting is best?***

The size of your group, facilities of your meeting place, and familiarity of members of your group with opinion polls are factors that will enter into your decision as to what type of discussion is best.

A forum speaker on this subject should be an expert on opinion polls. He should be given an opportunity to read this pamphlet before his talk. You, the leader, should time the meeting so that members of your group will have at least half an hour for informal discussion and questioning of the forum speaker.

The usefulness of opinion polls is a subject that lends itself to panel or symposium discussion. Panel speakers could discuss major points of view about opinion polls in a conversational manner before the rest of the group. Symposium speakers might divide the subject into four 10-minute talks. The first speaker's subject could have some such title as "How Do We Know What the Public Thinks?" in which he discussed the various ways that opinion is expressed. The second could discuss "How Accurate Are Opinion Polls?" The third could talk on the subject, "Are

Opinion Polls Really Useful?" And the fourth, looking into future potential uses of opinion polls, could discuss "What Are Possibilities and Dangers of Opinion Polls?"

Since most individuals will have some pretty definite ideas about the usefulness of opinion polls, you could turn your entire meeting over to informal discussion. You might illustrate poll-taking to your group by conducting some ballot voting at the meeting. For example, you might distribute small ballots at the beginning and ask all persons to vote on the questions raised by the title of this pamphlet, *Are Opinion Polls Useful?* voting "yes," "no," or "undecided." Then at the end of your discussion meeting you might take another vote by the same individuals on the same question and compare results. You might experiment also with some question in which you think there would be considerable diversity of opinion—preferably one of particular interest to your group. Phrase the question so that it is completely objective when another person is questioned. Phrase the same question so it is slanted to invite a "yes" answer, and then reslanted so it will invite a "no" answer. This will help demonstrate the responsibilities facing poll-takers, and also the dangers of opinion polls if they are used for propaganda purposes. If you decide to try a poll of your own, be sure to reread and observe the "Warning" on page 2 of EM 1, *Guide for Discussion Leaders*.

### ***Handbooks to help discussion leaders***

Various types of discussion meetings and numerous helpful suggestions to discussion leaders are discussed in considerable detail in EM 1, *GI Roundtable: Guide for Discussion Leaders*.

Leaders faced with the problem of planning and conducting a group discussion on the radio or over a loud-speaker system of the United States Armed Forces Institute will

find much valuable information and many helpful suggestion in EM 90, *GI Radio Roundtable*.

### ***Questions for discussion are important***

Readers of this pamphlet and discussion leaders will undoubtedly have many questions of their own regarding the usefulness of opinion polls. The leader should encourage members of his discussion group to ask their own questions, whether he uses a forum, panel, symposium, or informal discussion method. Below are some questions which may prove helpful to leaders in starting off the discussion or keeping it going.

#### **1**

How does public opinion influence legislation, social action, or political decisions in this country? Does the public usually show good judgment in its opinions on important issues, or is it best for our leaders to make decisions independently of the wishes of the people?

#### **2**

How can we find out what the public thinks? Do modern polls provide an accurate means for finding out what the people believe or want? Is the sampling method any better than other methods of feeling the public pulse? What important pitfalls are there in the sampling method? What constitutes a sample of the country's population?

#### **3**

What do you believe are the main factors which make people think differently on social, economic, and political questions? Are there major differences of opinion among various age groups, economic groups, or other classifications? Are small differences in the results obtained by various polls to be expected? Are "normal margins of error" neat alibis of the pollers, or can their appearance in results of sampling procedures be proved inevitable and logical?

Are there dangers in the growing use of polling procedures in business and government? Are there any restrictions to prevent misuse of polls to influence public opinion or to slant the results? How can the public be safeguarded from unreliable polls? How can the public judge the reliability of opinion polls?

How should our representatives in government view opinion polls? Should legislators base their votes on the desires of the public as shown by opinion polls? Can legislators study the polling results seriously and still remain public *leaders*? How would you use the data supplied by opinion surveys if you were a lawmaker? Should the government use the sampling method to find out what the people think about current issues and government policies? Is it dangerous to allow government administrators to conduct public opinion surveys? Do *you* think opinion polls are useful?

## FOR FURTHER READING

These books are suggested for supplementary reading if you have access to them or wish to purchase them from the publishers. They are not approved nor officially supplied by the War Department. They have been selected because they give additional information and represent different points of view.

**CONSUMER AND OPINION RESEARCH.** By Albert B. Blankenship. Published by Harper and Brothers, 49 East 33d St., New York 16, N. Y. (1943). \$4.50. A popular summary, particularly for businessmen.

**MANDATE FROM THE PEOPLE.** By Jerome S. Bruner. Published by Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 270 Madison Ave., New York 16, N. Y. (1944). \$2.75. What the public thinks about important current issues, as revealed by the polls, is brought together and interpreted in this volume.

**GAUGING PUBLIC OPINION.** By Hadley Cantril. Published by Princeton University Press, Princeton, N. J. (1944). \$3.75. A sound and valuable study of polls.

**RADIO AUDIENCE MEASUREMENT.** By Matthew N. Chappell and C. E. Hooper. Published by Stephen Daye Press, 48 East 43d St., New York 17, N. Y. (1944). \$3.50. The authors, who are associated with an enterprise which measures radio audiences, discuss adaptations of the sampling method to the field of radio listenership.

**GUIDE TO PUBLIC OPINION POLLS.** By George H. Gallup. Published by Princeton University Press (1944). \$1.50. This is a handbook which attempts to summarize the subject in question and answer form.

**THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE.** By Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet. Published by Duell, Sloan and Pearce (1944). \$3. A report on a comprehensive study of voting habits during the presidential campaign of 1940 in Erie County, Ohio. Sampling methods were used to gather information on political behavior, vote intentions, and the impact of reading and radio listening on the electorate.

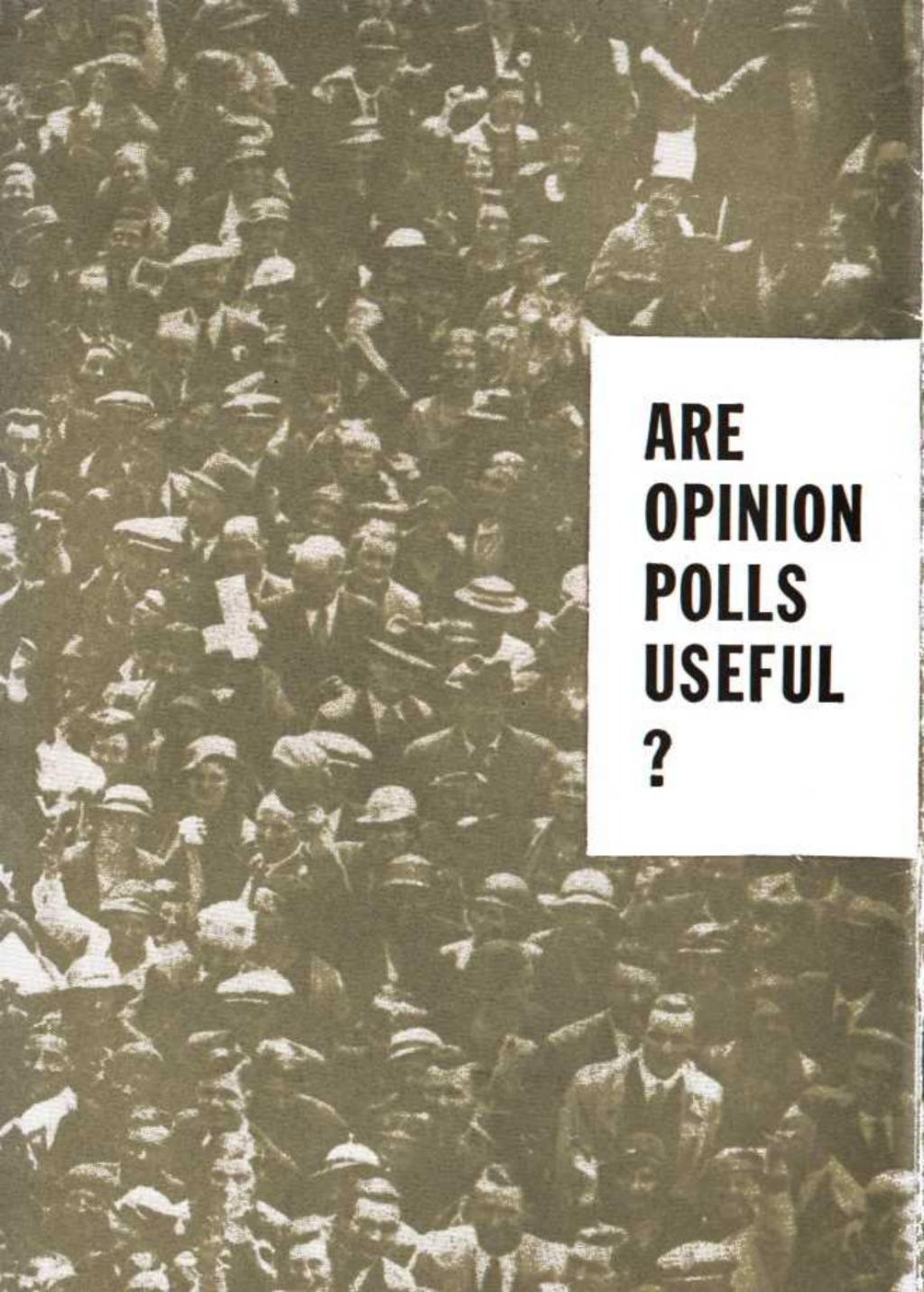
**WHAT AMERICA THINKS.** By William A. Lydgate. Published by Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 432 Fourth Ave., New York 16, N. Y. (1944). \$2.50. A member of one of the major polling organizations discusses sampling procedures and popular points of view in the recent years, revealed by the polls.

# OTHER GI ROUNDTABLE SUBJECTS

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